

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /026 W

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P R 040740Z JUL 75

FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5024

INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 AMMAN 4489

EXDIS

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PFOR: JO, SY, IQ, LE, XF, PLO

SUBJECT: KHADDAM VISIT TO JORDAN

1. PRIME MINISTER RIFAI DISCUSSED EVENING JULY 3, SYRIAN FM AND
DEPUTY PM KHADDAM'S TRIP TO JORDAN THAT SAME DAY WITH AMBASSADOR.

2. RELATIONS WITH JORDAN: RIFAI NOTED THAT KHADDAM MADE TRIP
OSTENSIBLY TO BRIEF KING ON HIS VISIT TO WASHINGTON. SINCE THIS HAD
BEEN PREVIOUSLY COVERED BY RIFAI'S EARLIER SECRET VISIT TO
DAMASCUS, MOST OF CONVERSATION CENTERED ON LEBANON, IRAQ AND
JORDAN-SYRIAN RELATIONS. RIFAI NOTED THAT
RELATIONS WITH SYRIA CONTINUE TO IMPROVE. THIS DOES NOT MEAN
THAT THERE ARE NOT DIFFERENCES OF VIEW, BUT THAT BOTH SIDES HAVE
TRIED TO BUILD CONFIDENCE WITH FRANK TALK, SYRIANS, RIFAI SAYS,
HAVE BEEN PRESSED BY JORDAN TO ACCEPT IMPORTANCE OF US ROLE AND THE
FUTILITY OF TRYING TO GAIN ANYTHING BY FIGHTING. RIFAI PERSONALLY
REMAINS OPTIMISTIC THAT US WILL WORK OUT NEXT STEP IN SINAI AND
THEN HOPES THAT US WILL MOVE ON TO A STEP ON GOLAN AFTER WHICH
GENEVA COULD TAKE PLACE PROVIDING FOR SOME BREATHING ROOM FOR US
AROUND ELECTION TIME. KHADDAM AND ASAD, SAYS RIFAI, APPARENTLY
ACCEPT THIS APPROACH AS A REASONABLE ONE FOR THE FUTURE, ALTHOUGH
THEY STILL DO NOT MUCH LIKE HAVING EGYPT TAKE THE LEAD.

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3. SYRIANS SEEM TO HAVE IMPRESSED JORDANIANS WITH THEIR SINCERITY AND COMMITMENT TO WORK TOGETHER. RIFAI TOLD ME THAT KHADDAM AGREED WITH JORDAN THAT SYRIA WOULD NOT ATTEND A QUADRIpartite MEETING WHICH IT APPEARED THAT CAIRO WAS PUSHING TO GET SET. RIFAI SAID HE HAD RECEIVED A TELEGRAM FROM THE ARAB LEAGUE PROPOSING ANOTHER SUCH MEETING AND THAT HE HAD PUT IT AWAY IN A DRAWER AND WOULD NOT ANSWER. RIFAI ALSO NOTED ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF SYRIAN COOPERATION. TWO NIGHTS AGO JORDANIANS CAPTURED 8 INFILTRATORS COMING ACROSS THE SYRIAN BORDER. AFTER SOME INTERROGATION THEY CLAIMED THEY WERE FROM SAIQA. JORDANIANS USED LOW LEVEL MILITARY INTELLIGENCE LIAISON CHANNEL TO INFORM SYRIANS (ON THE EVE OF KHADDAM VISIT). WHEN KHADDAM ARRIVED HE SAID THAT ASAD HAD AWAKENED HIM AT 4:50 AM THAT MORNING TO DISCUSS THE QUESTION. KHADDAM CLAIMED THAT THERE IS A SYRIAN DIRECTIVE THAT ASAD PERSONALLY BE INFORMED OF ALL QUESTIONS CONCERNING JORDAN. KHADDAM THEN WENT ON TO REASSURE JORDANIANS THAT ASAD HAD PERSONALLY LOOKED INTO THE MATTER. SYRIA WAS CHAGRINED BY THE DEVELOPMENT, SAIQA HAD ABSOLUTELY NO ORDERS TO CARRY OUT SUCH OPERATIONS, IT WAS POSSIBLY A SAIQA SPLINTER GROUP OR AN IRAQI PROVOCATION, SYRIA WOULD LIKE TO INTERROGATE THE PRISONERS AND WOULD SHARE THEIR RESULTS ETC. RIFAI SAYS HE BELIEVES THE SYRIANS IN THE CASE BECAUSE THEY HAVE NEVER BEFORE PICKED UP FEDAYEEN WHO ADMITTED BEING FROM SAIQA AND THAT KHADDAM'S WHOLE EXPLANATION LEFT THEM IN NO DOUBT ABOUT SYRIAN'S AND ASAD'S OWN PERSONAL CONCERN.

4. ON LEBANON, KHADDAM EXPLAINED IN DETAIL WHAT HAD HAPPENED DURING HIS MOST RECENT VISIT. RIFAI SAID THAT FROM KHADDAM'S EXPLANATION, THE LAST FEW HOURS AT THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE BEFORE THE FINAL FORMULATION OF THE GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN COMIC OPERA STUFF. KHADDAM'S ASSESSMENT WAS THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT HAD ONLY LIMITED POSSIBILITIES. SYRIANS APPARENTLY BELIEVE THAT FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION REMAINS FACT THAT MUSLIMS NOW CONSTITUTE 65 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION BUT THAT THEIR REPRESENTATION AND RIGHTS ARE NOT REFLECTED TO ANYTHING LIKE THIS PROPORTION. THUS ITS A CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM CONTROVERSAY AT THE BASE AND OTHERS ARE TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION. KHADDAM, ACCORDING TO RIFAI, BELIEVES THAT THE LEBANESE HAVE OVER PLAYED THE IRAQI ROLE (TO ATTRACT AND INTEREST THE SYRIANS),

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /026 W

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P R 040740Z JUL 75
FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5025
INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
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EXDIS

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THE COMMUNIST ROLE (FOR THE SAUDIS) AND THE LYBIAN ROLE (FOR THE EGYPTIANS) KHADDAM CONCLUDED THAT THE BIG LOSER HAVE BEEN THE RIGHT WING CHRISTAINS (PHALANGE) AND THEN SECONDARILY THE PALESTIANS. RIFAI SAYS THE PLO HAS LOOKED MORE AND MORE IMPOTENT AS THE CLASHES HAVE CONTINUED. RIFAI'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SYRIAN ROLE IS THAT IT REMAINS QUITE BENIGN AND DEDICATED TO MAINTAINING SOME STABILITY AND CALM IN LEBANON. KHADDAM IS APPARENTLY CONCERNED THAT ISRAELIS WILL USE INCRASINGLY DISTURBED SITUATION IN LEBANON TO LAUNCH SOME SORT OF AN ATTACK WHEN 60 PERCENT OF SYRIAN FORCES ARE ON THE IRAQI BORDER. OVER THE LONGER RUN SYRIAN SYMPHATHIES SEEM TO BE WITH A SOLUTION THAT WOULD ALLOW THE MUSLIMS GREATER JOB OPPORTUNITIES, WIDER REPRESENTATION IN GOVERNMENT AND A SHARE IN RUNNING LEBANON MORE CLOSELY REPRESENTATIVE OF THEIR CLAIMED 65 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION. SINCE THIS ALSO REPRESENTS RIFAI'S PERSONAL VIEW, I AM NOT TOO SURE HOW MUCH IS RIFAI AND HOW MUCH KHADDAM, BUT IT IS OF COURSE NOT IMPOSSIBLE THEY SEEM THINGS THE SAME WAY RIFAI SAYS HE STILL IS PESSIMISTIC ABOUT LEBANON AND SEES LITTLE CHANCE OF THE FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES NOTED ABOVE BEING MADE, WHICH IN HIS VIEW WOULD BE REQUIRED TO PRESERVE STABILITY.

5 ON IRAQ: RIFAI SAID THAT KHADDAM WAS VERY TOUGH. HE DOES NOT EXCLUDE

THE POSSIBILITY THAT SYRIANS WILL TAKE MILITARY ACTION AGAINST IRAQ.

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HE SAID FEUD IS DEEP AND THAT THE TWO REGIMES ARE LOCKED IN A STRUGGLE WHICH WILL ONLY END WITH THE DISAPPEARANCE OF ONE OF THEM. RIFAI IS BETTING ON THE SYRIANS. (HE HAS A LONG STANDING DISLIKE OF THE IRAQIS FOR HISTORICAL REASONS) HE SAYS THAT THE SYRIANS ARE NOW CLAIMING THAT THERE ARE VERY FEW IF ANY IRAQIS TROOPS FACING THEM ACROSS THE BORDER. THE PRESENT REGIME DOES NOT TRUST ITS MILITARY IN A FIGHT WITH SYRIAN. THE SYRIANS SEEM TO EXPECT THAT IF IT COMES TO A CLASH THE IRAQI ARMY (POST OPTOMISTIC ASSUMPTION) WOULD THROW OVER REGIME OR (LEAST OPTIMISTIC ASSUMPTION) THE ARMY WOULD DEFECT WHOLESALE

TO THE SYRIAN SIDE. COMMENT: WE HAVE NO WAY OF JUDGING
THE SITUATION BUT SYRIANS ASSUMPTIONS SEEM GRANDLY OPTIMISTIC.
PICKERING

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MINISTERIAL VISITS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 04 JUL 1975
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975AMMAN04489
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750232-0377
From: AMMAN
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750783/aaaacvmt.tel
Line Count: 172
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24 JUN 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <24 JUN 2003 by ElyME>; APPROVED <03 NOV 2003 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: KHADDAM VISIT TO JORDAN
TAGS: PFOR, JO, SY, IZ, LE, XF, PLO, (KHADDAM, ABD AL-HALIM)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006